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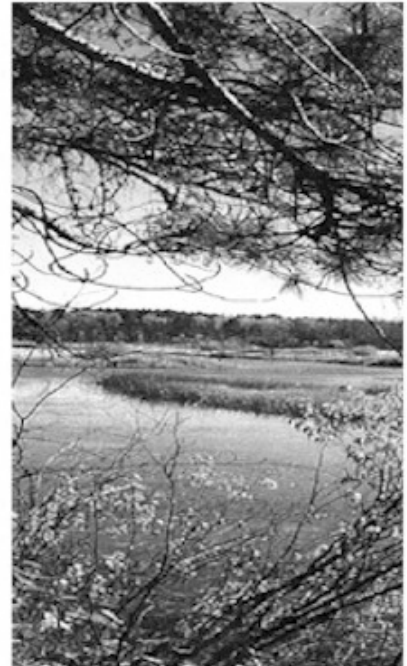
Chippewa National Forest



Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

*To accompany the Land and
Resource Management Plan*



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Final Environmental Impact Statement

Record of Decision

Beltrami, Cass and Itasca Counties, Minnesota

Responsible Official:

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service
Eastern Region
626 E. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414-297-3428

For Further Information Contact:

Chippewa National Forest
200 Ash Ave N
Cass Lake, MN
218-335-8651

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Preface

This document is called a Record of Decision. It describes how I reached my decision to select Modified Alternative E as the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan) for the Chippewa National Forest, and why I made this choice.

The Record of Decision has two purposes: first, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency. Second, and equally important, it explains the “why” of that decision. It is my sincere desire that this document clearly outlines my decision-making process.

Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. More than 7,000 letters were received during the development of the Revised Plan. These comments helped guide the Chippewa National Forest’s staff as they developed the Revised Plan. For the past several years, Chippewa National Forest personnel have worked with tribal governments, members of the public, elected officials, and other agencies to produce the revised Forest Plan. I am pleased to make my decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through coordination and cooperation to ensure sustainable conditions for the human and ecological environments on the Chippewa National Forest.

Creating a Revised Plan is not easy. Creating one that is supported by most members of the public is even more difficult. Forest management and the plan revision are complex processes. There is a myriad Federal laws, executive orders and policies that govern national forest management. The American people, for whom these forests are managed, often have divergent views and values when it comes to what they want the Chippewa National Forest to provide, to look like, and to be managed for. The revised Forest Plan helps to meet the mission of the Forest Service, which is “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” The Revised Plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees. However, science does not always provide definitive answers to complex resource management topics, nor can any one field of science provide all of the answers. Yet science can offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can clear the fog and let us see which choice best lets us reach our goals.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all the people who participated in the process - those who worked closely with the Forest Service staff in helping develop issues and identifying the need for change, in developing alternatives, and in providing substantive and helpful comments on the draft documents. Your participation in developing the Revised Plan has been critically important. Your continued interest and participation will be even more important as we implement, monitor and update the plan in the years to come.

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe: I want to thank and recognize the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. The Chippewa National Forest and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe have a unique relationship as neighbors. Their participation in the revision process helps all of us ensure that the specific rights and responsibilities within the Reservation are fulfilled.

Counties: I want to recognize and express my appreciation to Beltrami, Cass and Itasca Counties for their assistance, counsel, comments and promise of future cooperation as we implement the Revised Plan.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has been a valued partner in management of public forest resources. Their land management expertise and helpful suggestions are reflected in this Revised Plan, and they are true cooperators in managing forestlands in north central Minnesota.

US Fish and Wildlife Service: Close cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service was essential in developing management direction that will ensure the protection and recovery of the threatened Canada lynx, bald eagle and gray wolf. I thank the Service for its guidance and review, and look toward the future when through our cooperative actions, these species are recovered and can be removed from the list of threatened species.

Minnesota Forest Resource Council: I value the contributions of the members and task teams of the Minnesota Forest Resource Council. The Revised Plan adopts their site-level guidelines as a minimum, and makes extensive use of the landscape level information developed through the council's efforts, so that we can truly manage Minnesota's forest lands on a landscape basis.

University of Minnesota: The University of Minnesota played an instrumental role in developing, reviewing and modeling information that was used in developing the Revised Plan. University employees at St. Paul, NRRI-Duluth, and Grand Rapids made substantial contributions. I value our relationship and see greater cooperation as we implement the plan.

Interest Groups: Various interest groups provided key assistance in review and comment throughout the planning process, in making their desires known, and in offers of cooperation. My thanks go to the Nature Conservancy, the Ruffed Grouse Society, the Audubon Society, Minnesota Forest Industries, the Sierra Club, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Minnesota Timber Producers, and many other groups too numerous to mention.

Federal Agencies: Other Federal agencies and divisions provided valuable review and comments. Much appreciated are the contributions of the North Central Forest Experiment Station, State and Private Forestry, and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Individuals: I also want to extend my thanks to the thousands of individuals who cared enough to attend meetings, read documents and provide comments. Many of your suggestions helped improve the Revised Plan. We hope you continue to use and enjoy the Chippewa National Forest. I also ask that you provide us your thoughts on how we can continually improve the management of the Forest.

Forest Service Employees: Forest Service employees worked many long and hard hours developing the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Revised Plan. Their knowledge expertise and dedication was invaluable and their efforts are very much appreciated.

We now have a revised plan that will guide the management of your Chippewa National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. But what does that really mean? The previous Forest Plan for the Chippewa National Forest reflected the desires that the public had nearly 20 years ago when a primary focus was on what the land could produce.

The Revised Plan focuses on outcomes, recognizing that what we leave on the landscape is vitally important. At the same time, it recognizes how important forest management is to people and their social and economic well being. The outputs and uses of the forest that result from achieving the desired conditions and objectives will continue to provide jobs, products, and recreational uses for the American people. These lands can help maintain a quality of life for the people who live and work on them, for those who depend on them for fulfillment of hunting and gathering needs, and for those interested in spending time visiting this American treasure. Together, I believe we have crafted a Revised Plan with a strong foundation for ecological, social and economic sustainability over the long term.

Finally, where do we go from here and how do we get there? Our work is not finished; in fact it is just beginning. This revised plan is just a collection of words written on paper. We must transfer the ideas to the ground to make the desired conditions become real. The Chippewa National Forest is part of a vast and complex social, ecologic, and economic ecosystem in north-central Minnesota. It should not and cannot be managed without consideration and assistance from the various land managers, governments, and agencies that are part of the north-central landscape or the many people interested in that landscape.

The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together to implement the revised Forest Plan. I fully understand this can be difficult to achieve. At the same time, I am confident that cooperation will unite us, because I believe that the concern we all have for the Forest is our common bond - that these lands remain productive, ecologically healthy, and beautiful - for both the current generation and future generations.

Fortunately, Minnesota is well positioned for cooperation on a landscape level. Forest management plans of the State, the counties, and now the Chippewa's revised plan use common approaches developed through the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's site-level and landscape-level efforts. I am committed to working in partnership with all of those within the landscape and with interested individuals. The outcome of this partnership should be for all to complement the goals of others and help them to achieve their desired conditions and objectives on their land within the north-central landscape. With our combined efforts in implementing, monitoring, reviewing, developing new information, and adapting, we can truly integrate the management of forest resources.

It is an exciting time, and I am excited at the prospects and possibilities as we go forward. I believe this revised plan provides the springboard for managing the Chippewa National Forest and for working with others in managing the north-central Minnesota landscape.

I thank you again for your support, participation, and patience throughout this process. I invite your continued partnership in helping implement the revised plan and in keeping it fresh and relevant.

Randy Moore

Regional Forester

Eastern Region, USDA Forest Service

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Introduction

The *Chippewa National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan* (Forest Plan) is a 15-year strategy for managing National Forest resources. The strategy outlines environmentally sound management to produce goods and services in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits. The Forest Plan emphasizes different desired conditions and goals for various parts of the Forest. As the Revised Plan is implemented, management practices such as building and maintaining roads, restoring streams, harvesting timber, and rehabilitating campgrounds will occur in some areas, but not in others. In these ways, multiple-use goals and objectives are achieved in a balanced, cost efficient and sustainable manner.

This revised Forest Plan replaces all previous resource management plans for this Forest. The Forest Plan provides a fresh strategy for sound environmental management based on new information.

The Forest Plan may be amended or revised to respond to new information or management technologies, Congressional land designations, and changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the Forest Plan will include public involvement.

Six primary decisions are made within the Forest Plan:

1. Forest wide multiple-use goals and objectives.
2. Forest wide management requirements.
3. Management Area direction.
4. Lands suited/not suited for timber management.
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements.
6. Recommendations of Wilderness Study Areas to Congress.

The Goals and Objectives in the Forest Plan can be accomplished from physical, ecological, economical, and legal perspectives. The management practices and outputs proposed are projections the Forests will strive to accomplish in order to achieve the desired future conditions. The Plan is implemented through site-specific projects, and annual budgets determine which and how many projects are planned and implemented during any given year.

The Forest Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) are programmatic in nature, providing a long-range strategy for the Forests. Site-specific environmental analysis will occur for each project needed to implement this strategy. Any resulting documents will be tiered to the FEIS for the revised Forest Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The Forest

The Forest has a rich history, ranging from prehistoric times to the early logging era and the days of forest restoration performed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Established in 1908, the Chippewa National Forest National Forest was the first National Forest east of the Mississippi River. Originally known as the Minnesota National Forest, the name was changed in 1928 to honor the original inhabitants. It is the only National Forest

where the Forest's proclamation boundary and the Native American Reservation boundary overlap. In fact, the Leech Lake Reservation boundary overlaps almost wholly within the Forest's proclamation boundary. This is home to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Band members live, work, hunt, gather, and recreate on the Forest. This creates a very unique situation that calls for an equally unique relationship.

The Chippewa is at the headwaters of two major drainages, the Mississippi River and Hudson Bay. The Forest is a mosaic laced with 400,000 acres of open water; 1,300 lakes including three of Minnesota's five largest, 925 miles of streams and over 400,000 acres of wetlands. The Forest is over one-half water and includes thirteen percent of the water found in the entire National Forest system.

The Chippewa supports one of the largest breeding populations of bald eagles in the lower 48 states. Eagles are often viewed soaring over the larger lakes and streams of the area. White-tail deer, ruffed grouse, and waterfowl provide excellent wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities. There is no better way to see the Chippewa National Forest than on a trail. With 300 miles of snowmobile trails and 400 miles of multiple use trails, visitors have ample opportunities to hike and view spring wildflowers, bike along a tranquil wetland, hunt grouse on a hunter/walking trail, or ski through winter woods.

The Chippewa National Forest is a working forest. Recreation development, timber harvest and roads are evident. Private, State and County lands are interspersed across the Forest and people live and work on these lands. The Chippewa is within an easy three-hour drive for 10 million people residing in Minnesota's major metropolitan areas and surrounding states. As National Forests go, this is a busy place alive with the activities and people that have come to rely on the Chippewa for livelihood, subsistence and recreation.

A Vision of the Future

The forest that exists today evolved as a result of the influence of both natural and human processes. Natural disturbance processes of fire, wind, and to a lesser extent, flooding, helped to shape vegetation, wildlife, and aquatic resources of the Forest. Native Americans introduced human influence into the forest, and human influence reached much larger scale during the mining, logging and settlement era of the mid 1800's to early 1900's.

The forest that exists today is different from the forest that evolved under natural processes. It is also different from the forest that remained immediately following the logging era and different from the forest that will exist in the future as a result of implementing this Revised Plan. The vision of the future forest is changed in many ways from what was envisioned in the 1986 Forest Plan.

The Chippewa National Forest will sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the forest to meet the needs of present and future generations. Forest management will continue to support the relationship between people and the forest.

Forested ecosystems will include a greater mix of tree species, an increase in conifer, especially white and red pine, and greater representation of older and multi-aged forests. Representation of early successional systems and mid- to late-successional ecosystems will provide for species viability and diversity, as well as continue to supply healthy

populations of a variety of game species. Management will continue to provide habitat to support the recovery of the threatened bald eagle, gray wolf, and Canada lynx.

The Chippewa is an important recreation destination area in the State of Minnesota, as well as the nation. The Forest has and will continue to provide ample access through roads and trails, but in the future will also offer greater opportunities to experience solitude and more remote recreational experiences.

People will be able to experience a wide variety of recreational opportunities. The Forest will continue to offer a natural setting with road access to many areas. Developed camping sites will remain similar to the present, although some sites may be restored or have upgraded facilities. Scenery management will be an especially high priority in areas with many resorts and recreation facilities such as Norway Beach and Cutfoot Sioux.

The Chippewa will continue to be a significant contributor of forest products to support the timber industry and contribute to the economic sustainability of local communities. Timber harvest methods will be designed to contribute toward increased restoration of important components of healthy ecological systems. The production of timber will be monitored to ensure sustainable harvest levels over the long-term.

Decision Overview

I have selected Modified Alternative E as the Revised Plan for the Chippewa National Forest. The Selected Alternative is outlined in the *Chippewa National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan).

I chose Modified Alternative E because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Maintaining or enhancing biodiversity and the long-term health of the Forest
- Contributing to the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities
- Providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services from the forest
- Providing the best mix of benefits to address the need for change identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Emphasizing adaptive management over the long term, and
- Providing consistent direction at the Forest level that will assist managers in making project decisions at a local level. My choice also considered how the selected alternative responded to public comment received, internal management concerns and national policy.

My decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects, the management direction disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and revised Forest Plan, and the planning record in its entirety.

My decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Chippewa National Forest. It does not apply to any other Federal, Tribal, State, county, municipal or private lands, although in making my decision I considered the effects of my decision on those lands.

Management Area Allocation

The Revised Plan allocates National Forest System lands to the following management areas:

Management Area	Acres	Percent of Forest
General Forest Emphasis		
General Forest	347,319	53
General Forest Longer Rotation	191,829	29
Recreation and Scenic Emphasis		
Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape	12,469	2
Eligible Recreational Rivers	1,537	<1
Semi-primitive Recreation Emphasis		
Semi-primitive Non-motorized Recreation	21,937	3
Conservation and Rare Features Emphasis		

Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geologic, and Historical Areas	18,026	3
Riparian Emphasis Areas	52,883	8
Research Emphasis		
Research Natural Areas	2,140	<1
Candidate Research Natural Areas	1,699	<1
Experimental Forest	8,184	1

Biological Diversity, Forest Health, and Ecological Health

The Revised Plan ensures long-term health of the land by actively managing ecosystems through timber harvest, prescribed burning, and wildlife and watershed enhancement projects and in some areas allowing a more passive approach where natural processes predominate.

The Revised Plan addresses biological diversity at the site level and the landscape level. Vegetation objectives for Landscape Ecosystems help to maintain or restore ecological processes and functions. The Revised Plan also addresses the spread of non-native invasive species with an approach designed to eradicate, suppress, or contain populations.

Forest Vegetation Objectives

The Revised Plan lists short-term objectives (10-20 years) and long-term goals (100+ years) for age, composition, and tree species diversity. In general the objectives call for an increase in the amount of red, white and jack pine, spruce/fir, and northern hardwood vegetation communities. Paper birch, and lowland conifer and lowland hardwoods will generally be maintained at the current levels. Aspen vegetation communities will be decreased from current levels. The objectives also call for an increase of tree species diversity within stands. While maintaining a full range of age classes from young to old, the Revised Plan will increase the acres of old forest, old growth forest and multi-aged upland forest. Spatially, larger patches of both old and young trees will occur. The size limit for temporary openings created by timber harvest is increased to 1000 acres and in some instances may exceed 1,000 acres.

Watershed Health and Fish Habitat Management

The Revised Plan proactively manages watersheds and riparian areas for their inherent values. The Plan includes objectives to protect, improve and restore watershed and riparian area health in order to provide water quality and quantity and soil productivity necessary to support ecological functions and intended beneficial uses. The Revised Plan maintains the overall integrity of aquatic ecosystems, providing habitat for all species while supporting sustainable populations of game fish. The Plan recognizes the important roles, authorities and cooperative relationships that exist among the National Forests, American Indian tribes and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources regarding fish habitat management.

Wildlife Habitat

The Revised Plan provides the direction needed to maintain viable populations of species on the Chippewa National Forest. A few species have risks to their viability within the planning area because they are naturally rare or on the edge of their range. The Revised Plan recognizes that there are inherent limitations to the capability of the land to provide for these species. Although the risk of viability will likely persist, the Revised Plan promotes protection of the species and improvement of habitat. The Revised Plan affords special attention to the conservation of the bald eagle, gray wolf and Canada lynx, which are federally listed as threatened species. We have worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that the Revised Plan incorporates resource conservation measures and applicable species-specific measures from the Recovery Plans for eagle and wolf, and from the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy.

While the emphasis of the Revised Plan shifts toward managing for the entire spectrum of wildlife habitats, habitat for game species remains high. One important objective of the Plan is to provide quality hunting experiences.

Timber Harvest and Supply

Timber harvest will be the primary tool for accomplishing vegetative objectives. While other tools such as prescribed fire and mechanical treatment may be used, timber harvest is often the most effective and economical tool. It also provides social and economic benefits to our communities. I have established the allowable sale quantity in the Revised Plan at 580 million board feet for the first decade of Plan implementation. There are 459,313 acres classified as suitable for timber production.

Role of Fire

We will increase the use of fire as a management tool to accomplish ecological, silvicultural, forest health, and public safety objectives. My decision strengthens standards and guidelines that protect soil, water and air resources when using prescribed fire.

Recreation

Facilities, Settings and Opportunities

The Revised Plan increases the amount of National Forest System land that is managed with a primary emphasis on recreation. When compared to the 1986 Forest Plan, the Revised Plan provides the following:

- 9,500 acre increase in the Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape management area
- 9,500 acre increase in Semi-primitive Non-motorized Recreation management areas

Under the Revised Plan, the Chippewa National Forest will be managed for the following mix of recreational experiences:

- 3% of the Forest provides a semi-primitive non-motorized experience
- 91% of the Forest provides a roaded-natural experience,
- 35% of the Forest provides a more rural type of experience.

The Revised Plan provides for increased scenic quality in the ¼ to 3 mile area as viewed from popular travel routes and use areas.

Recreational Motor Vehicles

All Terrain Vehicles, Off-Highway Motorcycles, Four-Wheel Drives and Snowmobiles (RMVs): The Revised Plan provides for the designation of up to an additional 90 miles of ATV trail and 100 miles of snowmobile trail. With this decision, Recreational Motorized Vehicle use is not allowed on unclassified and higher maintenance level roads (OML 3, 4, and 5) and cross country RMV travel is prohibited. Generally, RMV use of low standard roads (OML 1 and 2) will generally be allowed pending site level decisions. Low standard roads where RMV use may cause unacceptable resource damage will be closed to such use (for example: summer use of winter use only roads).

Water Access

The number of new water access sites will be limited to five or less during the first 10 years. Facilities at those lakes identified as “Natural Environment Lakes” and small bodies of water would be limited to low development levels, such as a footpath and carry-down access.

Special Designations

Wilderness Study Areas

After reviewing public comments, I have decided to stay with my original proposal of not recommending any additional areas for wilderness study. Despite the continued high degree of public interest in potential wilderness additions, the analysis did not reveal compelling reasons that warrant my recommending wilderness study areas to the United States Congress.

Candidate Research Natural Areas

I have identified three areas (about 1,700 acres) as Candidate Research Natural Areas (CRNAs). These are in addition to the four Research Natural Areas (about 2,140 acres) that already exist on the Chippewa National Forest. As candidates, these areas will be further considered for their eligibility to become part of the national network of ecological areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and to provide important components of biological diversity for the Forest.

Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological and Historical Areas

I have allocated 23 areas (18,026 acres) as Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological and Historic Areas. Many of these areas have unique ecological attributes not found elsewhere on the Forest. Others represent unique historical sites and structures that typify the Chippewa National Forest. The majority of these acres are included in the Mississippi River Corridor, the North Fork Area and Ten Section Area. My decision to allocate these 23 areas will preserve their unique attributes while managing them for interpretive purposes.

Economic and Social Sustainability of Local Communities

The Forest will continue contributing to a vibrant timber and tourism industry while meeting ecological restoration, spatial pattern and forest age class goals. Although there will be some shift in the mix of goods, services and uses from the Chippewa National Forest, local communities will continue to enjoy the same types of settings, products and uses that support community stability.

Tribal Interests and Treaty Rights

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Boundary almost entirely overlaps the boundary of the Chippewa National Forest. I've considered not only Treaty Rights and our Government-to-Government relationship, but comments of tribal members who use and enjoy the Forest. My decision supports Tribal Treaty Rights, and provides for other activities and uses deemed important by those tribal members using the forest for a wide variety of reasons. The plan will sustain those values held important by tribal members.

Monitoring

My decision includes requirements that provide a strategic focus to monitoring so we can learn how well we are making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives called for in the Revised Plan.

Rationale for My Decision

Management Area Allocation

From the very start of this plan revision effort, we sought to create a Forest Plan that was different in look, feel and purpose from the 1986 Forest Plan. We created a Plan that is broad, strategic, and landscape-based. It recognizes the Chippewa National Forest does not exist in isolation, but is a part of a larger landscape managed and influenced by many owners and interests.

I looked at the desired conditions, goals and objectives as well as the standard and guidelines in the Forest Plan. I examined the mix of management area prescriptions and the environmental consequences disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement to see how each alternative provided for forest health and biological diversity and meets social needs. I concluded that the Revised Plan ensures long-term health of the land using an appropriate balance between active management practices of timber harvest, prescribed burning, and wildlife and watershed enhancement projects, and in some areas allows natural processes to occur. We took a landscape perspective in looking at ecosystems and were greatly aided by working with the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's North Central Landscape Group and its many dedicated members. The Natural Resources Research Institute of the University of Minnesota-Duluth also played an important role in bringing new science and possibilities to the group.

The Revised Plan future image of the Forest is described as the desired condition for each management area. I believe these management allocations, along with forest-wide management direction, provide the best mix in addressing the issues that follow.

Biological Diversity, Forest Health and Ecological Health

The Revised Plan incorporates approaches for addressing biological diversity at site and landscape levels rather than focusing primarily at site level through standards and guidelines as did the 1986 Plan. To provide for maintenance and restoration of ecological processes and functions, we designed the vegetation objectives based on Landscape Ecosystems.

The Plan includes objectives to move toward older, more structurally complex forest conditions. Research Natural Areas and Candidates, Unique Areas and areas not suited for timber production also contribute to meeting objectives for older trees and old growth.

In order to achieve those objectives and to maintain older forest across the landscape, stands must be resistant to loss from catastrophic wildland fire. The Revised Plan will provide the tools needed to treat unnaturally high levels of hazardous fuels so that the risk of catastrophic wildland fire is reduced while still maintaining objectives for increased structural composition, species diversity and older forest are not lost.

Forest Vegetation Objectives

The Revised Plan includes short-term vegetative objectives (10-20 years) and long-term vegetative goals for age, composition, and tree species diversity. These objectives are set for each of the major landscape ecosystem, or native plant communities that exist on the forest. They address forest resources in an integrated fashion considering desired recreational settings, biological diversity, timber production, forest health, wildlife habitat, and aquatic and riparian values.

Larger patches of both old and young trees are encouraged. The size limit for temporary openings created by timber harvest is increased to 1000 acres. Larger harvest areas will better mimic the spatial design and extent of natural disturbances. They will also help build larger patches of forest for the future. A one thousand acre patch of young trees today will become a large patch of old trees 80 to 150 years from today. Larger patches of older forest will provide habitat for those wildlife and plant species that favor interior forest conditions. The vegetative objectives in the Revised Plan are consistent with the desired future forest conditions outlined in the North Central Forest Landscape Report of the Minnesota Forest Resource Council.

Watershed Health and Fish Habitat Management

Clean, clear, and productive waters are a big reason that people come to the Chippewa National Forest to fish, swim, boat, camp, and view scenery. But these waters also provide important ecological functions that contribute to biodiversity and fish and wildlife habitat. Maintaining and improving watershed health, healthy riparian areas and a productive fishery are vitally important in managing the Chippewa National Forest.

In choosing the Selected Alternative, I elect to proactively manage watersheds and riparian areas for their inherent values. This means favoring long-lived tree species and managing for longer rotations within riparian zones and improving road and trail crossings of streams to ensure stable soils, fish passage, unimpeded water flow and sediment transport.

Riparian Emphasis Management Areas are located along major rivers and lakes and selected large areas of relatively contiguous wetlands. Management in these areas focuses on conserving or restoring special social and ecological features of the Forest. The Mississippi River Corridor is allocated to the Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological, or Historical Management Area. The Unique Area allocation places the appropriate emphasis on this resource of national significance.

The FEIS recognizes the increased risk to watershed health due to increases in newly designated ATV and snowmobiles trails and new water accesses. Proactive watershed management and the goals established for reducing road densities and uncontrolled access offset these risks. The Revised Plan represents the best balance for protecting lakes and streams and enhancing watershed health.

In reviewing the comments on riparian and watershed health, I note that several people and groups recommended that the Minnesota voluntary site level guidelines for riparian areas be used instead of the more proactive approach I have chosen. One concern was

that the approach I chose would reduce the amount of land available for timber harvest. Considering the abundance of lakes, streams and wetlands on the Forest and the importance of those waters to the local communities, this emphasis is appropriate and can be accomplished while still providing for sustainable harvest levels.

The lakes, streams and wetlands within the Chippewa National Forest provide habitat for many species of fish. Three of the five largest lakes in Minnesota lie within the boundaries of the Forest. Angling activities generate nearly \$1 billion to the Minnesota economy each year. The magnitude of the industry, along with the contribution of the national forests in terms of water resources, underscores the importance of the Forest Service's role in managing fish habitat and lake access.

Regarding fish habitat management, the Forest Plan recognizes the important roles, authorities and cooperative relationships that exist among the national forests, American Indian tribes and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Based upon the analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, my decision in selecting the Revised Plan is made in part because it maintains the overall integrity of the aquatic system while supporting sustainable populations of sport fish. This is provided through objectives and standards and guidelines and by providing habitat for all aquatic species including those that are threatened, endangered or of special interest. The watershed and riparian emphasis of the Revised Plan contributed in large part to my decision.

Wildlife Habitat

The Chippewa National Forest will continue to provide habitat for a vast array of wildlife species. Managing wildlife habitat on the National Forest is accomplished through cooperative partnerships between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

Viable Populations and Regional Forester Sensitive Species: The Revised Plan will maintain viable populations of all species on the Chippewa National Forest within the capability of the land. For a few species that are naturally rare or on the edge of their range, the Revised Plan calls for protection of the species' habitat, but the Chippewa National Forest alone cannot ensure continued viability. The Revised Plan is expected to reduce the suitability of some habitats for the four-toed salamander, which is on my list of regional sensitive species. I recognize this, but approve the Revised Plan knowing that it includes standards and guidelines that will maintain viability and not result in a trend towards federal listing of the species. The management direction in the Revised Plan will result in no species trending toward listing under the Threatened and Endangered Species Act.

Federally Listed Threatened Species: The Revised Plan affords special attention to the conservation of bald eagle, gray wolf, and Canada lynx and the habitats upon which they depend. The Forest Service worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that the Revised Plan contributes to the recovery of these three species by incorporating conservation measures from federal Recovery Plans for the eagle and wolf and from the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. This work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and

incorporation of conservation measures into the Revised Plan, helped lead to a non-jeopardy Biological Opinion issued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Other Species of Management Interest: Many people are concerned about maintaining populations of important game species such as deer, grouse, and woodcock. Other people believe that populations of deer are at levels where they are causing problems with other resources as well as public safety concerns.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe have the authority for setting deer population objectives and for establishing hunting regulations. The Chippewa National Forest works with the them in providing game species habitat.

Over time, the Revised Plan will decrease the amount of aspen and young tree age classes, but will still maintain high levels game species habitats. Increases in conifer and older forest provide necessary and beneficial cover habitat. The actual change in habitat will occur over a long period of time and will be influenced by the habitat provided by intermingled private, county and state lands. In the shorter term (next 10-20 years) there will be minimal effects as a result of this change in condition and game species habitat is expected to remain high.

In deciding on the Revised Plan, my decision is to gradually reduce the emphasis that the 1986 Plan placed on game species habitat and turn the emphasis toward managing for the entire spectrum of wildlife habitats. The Revised Plan continues to recognize the social and economic importance of game species. This is reflected in management direction that calls for providing quality hunting experiences.

Timber Harvest and Supply

The Revised Plan's Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) of 580 million board feet is the maximum quantity of timber that may be sold from suitable lands on the national forest within a decade. The allowable sale quantity level for each alternative is the result of meeting vegetation objectives within Management Area direction. These vegetative objectives are also largely responsible for determining the number of acres treated, the type of harvest treatment, and how and to what species harvested stands are regenerated.

My decision provides for steady and predictable supplies of forest products from the Chippewa National Forest. The Revised Plan will ensure that a mix of forest products by species and size are available to local mills. The base sale schedule provides for a non-declining even flow of timber.

Several people commenting on the Draft EIS requested a departure from non-declining even flow (selling more timber in the first two decades and then less in subsequent decades). There are several justifiable reasons for doing so, and in fact the Final EIS evaluates two alternatives that have a departure from non-declining even flow of timber. However, I have decided against a departure because of the difficulty of maintaining key

wildlife habitats in the first two decades. And the difficulty of maintaining a full range of vegetation age classes in future decades.

As we manage toward a goal of improving forest health, we will harvest timber from areas with low value timber that in the past may have been regarded as economically marginal. Work in these areas is essential for improving forest health.

Several public comments questioned which the controlling factor was; the acres to be treated or the ceiling of the allowable sale quantity. This concern centered on the allowable sale quantity and if it might artificially constrain the Forest's ability to treat the amount of acres called for in the Revised Plan. For example: If the plan called for treating 7,000 acres per year, but the ASQ (sell volume limit) was reached after only 5,500 acres were treated, then the Plan could not attain the desired vegetative objectives or conditions. There was concern that the ASQ, because it was a ceiling, may need to be adjusted so it did not constrain the Forest's ability to attain the desired vegetative condition.

In responding to this concern, we re-examined timber yield assumptions and constraints used in the Draft EIS and Draft Forest Plan. We found some constraints or reductions in volume that appeared to duplicate factors already accounted for in the yield tables. We compared modeled yields with those actually attained in recent timber sales. We found that actual yields from recent harvest and those projected in the yield tables were comparable; therefore we made no modifications to the yield tables.

I am aware of the expectation of some that yields from Federal land equal that of State, County, and private lands. I expect our yields for National Forest lands to differ from industrial forest lands because of our multiple use mandate and compliance with the many laws regarding habitat, species, water, air, and heritage resources. The role of the National Forest as well as the outcomes and outputs that we are mandated to manage for simply differ from those of industrial forests and therefore I fully expect that the yield estimates would be different. In applying the yield models and in selecting an allowable sale quantity, I have been careful to not create a barrier to accomplishing an array of objectives and goals and to maintain a focus on outcomes.

Role of Fire

The exclusion of fire in recent history has created areas of unnaturally high fuel loadings that pose an increased risk of catastrophic wildland fire. Priority areas for hazardous fuel reduction projects will be based on proximity to Urban Interface Areas and areas where Fire Regime and Condition Class create higher fire risk.

Concerns were raised about using stand replacement fire and burning up material that could be used commercially. Where areas are identified as suitable and available for timber harvest, commercial timber sales will be used as the primary management tool. Prescribed fire will complement mechanical treatments in achieving objectives. In my decision, I am recognizing the increased use of fire as a management tool to accomplish ecological, silvicultural, forest health, and public safety objectives. My decision includes strengthened or refined standards and guidelines that will adequately protect soil, water and air resources in light of an increased use of fire as a management tool.

Recreation

Recreation Facilities, Settings and Opportunities

The Chippewa National Forest, and northern Minnesota in general, are renowned locally, regionally and nationally for the quality and variety of recreational opportunities they provide. Many people come to northern Minnesota to experience solitude, watch wildlife and birds, hunt for game and to enjoy our lakes and streams.

The Chippewa National Forest has an extensive road and trail network and is highly accessible to motorized recreation. With this decision, I am increasing the amount of land in semi-primitive non-motorized areas in order to provide greater opportunities for a more remote recreational experience.

Recreation Motor Vehicles (RMVs)

The Chief of the Forest Service has identified unmanaged recreation, especially the undesirable impacts from off-highway vehicles, as a major threat facing the national forests. Concerns include the amount of unplanned roads and trails, erosion, lack of quality riding opportunities, water degradation and habitat destruction from off highway vehicle activity.

Use of snowmobiles, ATVs, off-highway motorcycles and four-wheel drive vehicles are a legitimate use of National Forest System land, and this use must be carefully managed. In making this decision on recreation motor vehicles, I considered the many public comments and the need to provide opportunities for a very popular and growing recreational pursuit, as well as the need to protect resources and provide opportunities for non-motorized recreational uses. I believe my decision provides opportunities for RMV use that is managed in a way that protects the forest's ecological resource and reduces conflicts among users.

Designated Trails: The Revised Plan provides for up to an additional 90 miles of ATV trails and 100 miles of snowmobile trails to be designated. The purpose of this designated trail system is to provide a high quality RMV trail experience. The location and exact amount of trail to be designated are not determined in the Revised Plan. We will coordinate closely with the Minnesota DNR as they develop their motorized trail system, so that the systems are compatible and interlink if possible. Newly designated snowmobile trails must meet the Revised Plan's management direction for Canada Lynx recovery. We will also work closely with local governments and various interest groups and individuals to determine the site-specific locations of the trails.

Use on Existing Roads: RMV use on high standard (OML 3, 4 and 5) and unclassified roads is prohibited. Travel on low standard roads is allowed pending site level decisions. The Chippewa National Forest has an extensive road system that provides abundant access to most parts of the Forest as well as connector routes to existing state and county trail systems. Limiting RMV use to designated

roads and trails will still provide high levels of access and opportunity while protecting resources and providing for a safe, high quality trail experience.

Cross-Country Travel Prohibition: All cross-country travel (public use of ATVs, off-highway motorcycles, four-wheel drives and snowmobiles off of a designated road or trail) is prohibited. This includes a prohibition on cross-country travel for big game retrieval and for furbearing trapping access. I reached this decision after considering public comments and doing further environmental review. I believe this approach is necessary to avoid user conflicts and damage to the forest and resources.

Water Access

The Forest continues to get requests for new or improved water access sites, many of which involve development of facilities to accommodate the trend of larger boats and motors. The 1986 Forest Plan provided little direction with regard to the amount or level of development for new water access sites, therefore it is important that the Revised Plan provide direction to help determine if new lake and river access sites are appropriate, and what level of development is appropriate for which sizes and types of lakes.

I have decided that the Revised Plan will limit construction of the number of new water access sites on National Forest System lands to 5 or less for the first decade. I based this decision on current and projected demand, while also considering the need to keep some lakes without developed access. However, facilities at Natural Environment lakes and small bodies of water would be limited to facilities such as a path and carry-down access. This decision provides for a variety of facilities, while still maintaining some lakes at the remote end of the development scale.

Special Designations

Potential Wilderness Additions

A decision that must be made when revising Forest Plans is whether to recommend additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. In making this decision, it is important to consider the Wilderness in the context of the larger area around the Forest and the existing opportunities available to people who live or recreate in Minnesota and nearby Ontario, Canada. The Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness is over 1.086 million acres in size. Immediately to the north in Ontario, is Quetico Provincial Wilderness Park, which is 1.175 million acres in size. To the northwest and adjacent to the BWCAW, the Voyageurs National Park manages nearly 127,500 acres of parklands evaluated for wilderness study. Within and adjacent to the BWCA Wilderness, over 2.39 million acres (more than 3,700 square miles) are managed for wilderness values.

After reviewing public comments, I have decided to stay with the proposal to not recommend any potential areas for wilderness study in the final plan. Despite the continued high degree of public interest in potential wilderness additions, the analysis did

not reveal any compelling reason to recommend any wilderness study areas to the United States Congress.

The two areas on the Chippewa that were considered for potential wilderness, while meeting roadless inventory criteria, are relatively small, isolated and were determined to not add significantly to the wilderness recreational opportunity. Ecological opportunities of these two areas can be best managed and protected through designation as Unique Management Areas and Riparian Emphasis Areas.

An important aspect of my decision is that these parcels, although not being recommended for wilderness, provide special opportunities for the public to recreate and enjoy the land in a non-wilderness setting while still enjoying a primitive experience.

Candidate Research Natural Areas

With this decision I have identified three areas (about 1,700 acres) as Candidate Research Natural Areas (CRNAs). These are in addition to the four Research Natural Areas (about 2,140 acres) that already exist on the Chippewa National Forest. As candidates, these areas will be further considered for their eligibility to become part of the national network of ecological areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and to provide important components of biological diversity for the Forest. These three areas have been assigned to a management area that is consistent with RNA objectives. As we implement the plan, we will complete the required establishment reports and seek concurrence of the Director of the North Central Research Station. These actions will complete the administrative steps required for the RNA designation.

My decision on presenting these three areas as candidates for further evaluation and possible establishment was based upon an extensive inventory and evaluation conducted during the revision process.

Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological and Historic Areas

In addition to the CRNAs, there are other areas on the Forest that are unique in character. Unique Biological, Geological and Aquatic communities exhibit plant communities, associations, and/or species of particular interest. Unique Historical areas have important historical and traditional uses that have occurred in the past and may still be occurring today. I have allocated 23 areas (approximately 18,000 acres) as Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological and Historic Areas. The majority of the acres are included in the Mississippi River Corridor, the North Fork Area and Ten Section Area. My decision to allocate these 23 areas will preserve their unique attributes while managing them for interpretive purposes where appropriate.

Economic and Social Sustainability

My decision insures that the Chippewa National Forest will continue to be an important contributor to the social and economic wellbeing of communities in the Beltrami, Cass, Itasca, and adjacent counties. I recognize the Forest's role as "part of the neighborhood."

I also know that the Forest is not the only factor driving the social and economic well being of these communities.

We worked closely with State, County and Tribal officials in developing the Revised Plan. Coordination with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, the State of Minnesota, Beltrami, Cass and Itasca Counties will be important as we implement the Plan to insure that mutual goals and objectives are achieved.

My decision will allow the Forest to participate in keeping and maintaining a vibrant timber and tourism industry, while meeting various ecological goals. The Revised Plan provides a blend of goods and services and sustains multiple use of the federal land while protecting and enhancing the health of the land.

Although my decision will not provide the highest return to counties, I believe it provides the best mix of the many resources that contribute to local economies. My decision recognizes the incomparable value of the many developed and dispersed recreation activities, and the contribution to local economies by those using recreation opportunities. Although there will be some shift in the mix of goods, services and uses from the Chippewa National Forest, local communities will continue to enjoy the same types of settings, products, and uses that support community stability.

Tribal Interests and Treaty Rights

I want to especially acknowledge the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's (LLBO) role in both the Plan development and in its implementation. I recognize the unique relationship between the LLBO and the Chippewa National Forest in that the Reservation Boundary almost entirely overlaps the Forest Boundary. Tribal members are not visitors or users of the Forest; this is their home. General trust responsibilities and obligations are in large part met by national forests through compliance with laws and regulations relevant to federal land management. Many of these laws and regulations include specific provisions for consulting with American Indian Tribal governments. Conducting meaningful consultation is one key to fulfilling general trust responsibilities. The Chippewa National Forest has made a special effort to work with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe who exercise treaty rights affected by my decision. I've considered not only Treaty Rights and our Government-to-Government relationship, but comments of tribal members who use, live in and enjoy the Forest. Together, we've gone beyond meetings and have been action-based. My decision supports Tribal Treaty Rights, and as importantly provides for other activities and uses deemed important by those using the forest for a wide variety of reasons. The plan will sustain those values held important by tribal members. We will continue to work with the Band and Band members during implementation of the Plan

Monitoring

I have decided to shift the focus of the monitoring section (Chapter 4) of the Revised Plan from addressing only the basic planning requirements, to a more strategic focus on monitoring the extent to which we are making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives called for in the Revised Plan. In strengthening the monitoring section of the Revised Plan, the Forest worked with the National Inventory and Monitoring Institute and my staff here in the Regional Office. The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of a Forest Plan, with increasing specificity as the Plan is stepped down to specific projects. I also intend to provide

opportunities for the public and agencies not only to help in developing a detailed monitoring guide, but also to become partners in conducting monitoring and helping interpret the results.

Changes between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements

We received a great deal of public and internal comment on our Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Forest Plan. We listened to your comments and based on them, made several modifications to the selected alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and to the Forest Plan.

The changes ranged from minor editing for improved clarity to changes in management area allocations, desired conditions and objectives and standards and guidelines. Some changes were also based on data corrections or further vegetation modeling efforts. These changes are reflected in the Final EIS and the Final Revised Plan for the Chippewa National Forest.

The summary below describes the most substantial changes made between the Draft and Final EIS and Plan.

Changes in Management Area Allocations

Recreation Use in a Scenic Landscape Areas

This management area increased to include Norway Beach and all of the Cutfoot Sioux Recreation Area. Norway Beach was previously part of the Ten Section area and proposed as a Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological, or Historical Area. However, management and use in this area is for developed recreation and scenic view emphasis. The Recreation Use allocation better matches existing and intended use. At Cutfoot Sioux, additional acreage was added to the Recreational Use Management Area so that the entire recreation area would be managed under the same management direction.

Semi Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) Areas

This management area increased due to expansion of an existing area and an addition of a new area. The Draft Plan maintained the same allocation of SPNM Management Area as the 1986 Plan. After review of public comments, and re-looking at the Recreation Opportunity issue and need for change, we decided that a greater effort needed to be made to identify areas that could provide additional SPNM experiences on the Chippewa, which was largely emphasizing roaded-natural recreation opportunities. The North Winnie SPNM area was added and the existing Soumi Hills SPNM area was expanded to help provide a broader spectrum of recreational opportunities. These areas were removed from the General Forest and General Forest-Longer Rotation Management Areas.

Unique Biological, Aquatic, Geological or Historical Areas

The headwater of the Mississippi River is one of the most unique aspects of the Chippewa National Forest. We received many comments regarding greater recognition for the Mississippi River corridor. This area was removed from the Riparian Emphasis Management Area and allocated to the Unique Management Area to reflect its importance as a national resource. The North Fork Area is a large un-roaded area of old lowland black spruce/tamarack/white cedar/mixed conifer swamp and was proposed as a potential Research Natural Area (pRNA) in the Draft Plan. After further review, I have determined that it is more appropriate to manage this area for its unique biological aspects rather than for its potential research opportunities. The Trout Lake UB area was included in the Draft Plan as part of the Trout Lake SPNM area. This is a Mixed Pine-Hardwood Forest community. Most of the area is in an old forest condition and is occupied by a mixture of aspen, red pine, sugar maple-basswood, black spruce, deep marsh, sedge meadow and bog communities. The Sucker Bay area is a Maple-Basswood Forest community. Both the Trout Lake and Sucker Bay areas represent intact communities that have become rare on the Chippewa National Forest.

Candidate Research Natural Area

This management area's acreage decreased overall with the allocation of the North Fork Area as a Unique Area. However, two areas were added, Pimushe Lake and Ottertail. These two areas—along with Sunken Lake and the existing Research Natural Areas—represent the highest quality RNA candidates on the Forest.

Changes in Addressing Tribal Rights

Desired Conditions and Objectives were added to further clarify the Forest's role in maintaining treaty rights and coordinating with Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO). Maps include reservation boundaries and the FEIS section on areas of high interest to the LLBO has been expanded. Many of the LLBO's concerns such as increases in pine types, increased within stand diversity, reductions in aspen and reductions in fragmentation were incorporated into the Draft Plan. Land Suitability Classes were changed to reflect different management emphasis in areas of special interest to LLBO members. Changes between the Draft Plan and the Revised Plan further address resource concerns raised by the LLBO including reductions in the amount of clearcutting, increased direction for non-native invasive species, reductions in fragmentation and increases in patch sizes, limits to RMV travel and reductions in the amount of available deer and beaver habitat.

Changes in Off Highway Vehicle Policy

The Selected Alternative differs from the Proposed Plan in that all public cross-country off-highway vehicle travel is prohibited without exception. The Proposed Plan allowed an exception in most management areas for big game retrieval and furbearer trapping access. Public comments, the difficulty in managing and mitigating both social and resource

impacts and the Forest Service's national concern about unmanaged recreation as a threat to national forests, weighed into my decision.

Another change between the Draft and the Revised Plan is that RMV use of unclassified roads is prohibited. This decision may differ from the approach that the State of Minnesota is taking for many of the lands they manage. We will continue to work with the State to help recreation users understand the differences in policies.

Changes to Stand Replacement Fire

I have decided that stand replacement fire (prescribed fire that is used to kill an entire stand of trees) will generally not be used as a management tool within parts of the Forest classified as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest, often followed by prescribed fire, will be the primary tool used to meet vegetation age class objectives. Prescribed fire will continue to be used to restore ecosystem function, treat hazardous fuels and for site preparation. I have made this change because I have concerns about the intensity of fire needed to accomplish stand replacement, especially in certain timber types, the associated protection and safety of adjacent lands and properties, and the loss of timber resources that could be utilized if other stand replacement tools were employed.

Changes to Acres Treated and Percent of Clearcutting

The acres treated increased by 1,489 acres per year in the first decade and the amount of clearcutting was reduced to 38% of the total acres harvested. Selection cuts, partial harvest and thinning treatments increased to 52% of the total acres harvested, an increase of approximately 16% over the Draft Plan. The changes in acres treated and in the mix of harvest methods better meet vegetation age class and composition objectives; maintain desired spatial patterns and the critical habitat they provide and meet projected timber volumes. Current age class distributions on the Chippewa are skewed toward the youngest age classes. Vegetation objectives generally call for more acres in older age classes. Utilizing partial harvest methods enables the Forest to treat more acres for increased health, reduced fuel loads and increased growth and vigor while moving towards vegetation objectives for an older, more structurally diverse forest. The Final Environmental Impact Statement analysis displays these outputs and the environmental effects for the selected alternative.

Changes to Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)

The allowable sale quantity for the first decade increased from 500 million board feet to 580 million board feet. Between the Draft and the Final Plan we continued to develop and ground-truth the timber harvest model. We found some constraints or reductions in volume projections that appeared to duplicate factors already accounted for in the yield tables. We also compared projected model yields with a sample of yields actually attained through timber sales. We found that actual yields from most recent harvests and those projected in the yield tables matched well and decided to remove a correction factor that was applied prior to release of the Draft Plan. The ASQ in the Revised Plan more accurately reflects the actual outputs that will result from the acres treated.

Changes to Management Direction for Threatened Species

The Forest worked closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to provide management direction that would contribute to the recovery of the bald eagle, gray wolf, and Canada Lynx. A guideline was added to protect wolf dens. I have added and refined standards and guidelines to address concerns related to lynx. Changes in the Final EIS and the Selected Alternative were largely related to road and trail density, effective road closures and increases in over-the-snow routes.

Changes Associated with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act

In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) became law. I have added management direction to the Forest Plan for the maintenance of old growth characteristics when conducting HFRA covered projects in old growth stands. I have also prioritized areas proposed for hazardous fuels reduction treatments based on fire regime and condition class.

Changes to Monitoring Strategy

After considering the many comments received on monitoring, I have decided to shift the focus of the monitoring section (Chapter 4) of the Revised Plan from addressing only the basic planning requirements to a more strategic focus of monitoring how well we are making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives called for in the Revised Plan. The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of a Forest Plan, with increasing specificity that will be identified during project design as the Plan is implemented.

Other Changes

Between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement, several other changes were made, including updating the stand data used in the analysis of Modified Alternative E and recalculating economic effects of all alternatives based on the updated allowable sale quantity figures and new visitor use estimates from the National Visitor Use Monitoring report. In addition, habitat for some species of concern was re-analyzed for all alternatives using additional indicators.

Public Involvement

From the very beginning of the process to revise the Forest Plan, we looked for ways to actively and meaningfully engage the public. Early on, tribes, governments, agencies, groups and individuals were invited to become actively involved in crafting a revised plan with the goal of “a revised Forest Plan that the public supports.” The Revised Plan is stronger, better crafted, and the Chippewa National Forest will be better managed as a result of the public’s new ideas, new approaches, additional information, and review of draft documents. Active involvement by the public will continue to be needed to help implement the Revised Plan and to ensure it stays up to date.

A detailed description of the public involvement process is included in Appendix A of the Final EIS. Key steps in revision where the public was involved in major way include:

- **Helping determine the need for change** and the proposed scope of change to address in the revision process. We solicited public input to validate issue descriptions and to prioritize issues. We mailed issues packages to over 1,500 individuals and received 189 responses. We held public workshops for public review of reference papers and 60 participants attended. Nine Forest Service working groups, including members of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and tribal governments helped develop proposals to resolve issues. Based upon this work, 12 issues were proposed in the Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for revising the Chippewa and Superior Plans.
- **Commenting on the Notice of Intent:** The Notice of Intent, which listed need for change items and described a proposal for revising the Forest Plan, was mailed to 2,070 people and groups. Fourteen open houses were held to explain the proposal and to encourage comments. The normal 60 day comment period was extended by an additional 30 days. Over 460 comments were received and as a result, 26 issues were carried forward in some form to be addressed in the environmental impact statement.
- **Development of Preliminary Alternatives:** We wanted to have the public actively involved in developing alternatives. We conducted three workshops that were attended by over 200 people. The workshop participants suggested 30 themes for alternatives. In addition to the workshop themes, several groups developed and submitted detailed alternatives to the Forest Service. The 30 themes and the submitted alternatives were combined and further developed to arrive at the seven alternatives considered in detail in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.
- **Consultation with Tribal and other Governmental Agencies:** Throughout the revision process and continuing to the present, the Forest Service has worked with Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Beltrami, Cass and Itasca Counties, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the University of Minnesota and University of Minnesota-Duluth, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Environmental Protection Agency, Forest Service Research, State and Private Forestry and other governmental agencies to keep them apprised of the status of Forest Plan revision and to consult on common management concerns. Under the Federal Advisory Committees Act, national forests may consult with sovereign nations and representatives of elected officials differently than private citizens and organizations.
- **Review and Comment on Draft EIS and Proposed Plan:** Once the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan were completed, they were made

available for public comment for an initial 90 day period, which was later extended for an additional 30 days (120 days total). Along with the Proposed Plan and Draft EIS, we issued a “Reviewer’s Guide” to help reviewers navigate through the documents so they could provide substantive comments. The documents were mailed to over 425 people, groups, agencies, and governments. They were also made available at local libraries and through the Internet. The Internet site also included MAPSERVER, which allowed users to look at maps of how the various alternatives would allocate resources. We held a series of meetings in northern Minnesota and in the Twin Cities metro area where the public could meet with members of the planning team to ask questions and get information to help them in preparing public comments. The response to the draft documents was huge. Over 1,280 letters were received, resulting in over 26,900 comments on specific resources. Comments were well prepared, constructive, and greatly helped in crafting the Revised Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

- **Response to Comment and Preparation of Final Plan and Final EIS:** Appendix J of the Final Environmental Impact Statement contains the public comments summarized from the responses that we received during the comment period on the Proposed Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This appendix also includes an explanation of what the Forest Service did with each comment. Changes were made to the Final Environmental Impact Statement or the Revised Plan as a result of the comment, or an explanation was provided for why the requested change was not made.

Alternatives

Alternative Development

In 1997, the Forest Service issued a Notice of Intent to revise the 1986 Forest Plan. The notice informed the public about the formal revision process. An initial proposal of how to change the current Forest Plan was made in the Notice of Intent. The Forest solicited comments and suggestions from the public on the proposal for revising the Forest Plan and possible alternatives for addressing the issues associated with the proposal. These public comments helped frame the alternatives and analysis in the final environmental impact statement.

Preliminary themes for alternatives were developed for public and employee workshops in 1998. These themes were designed to address the issues and concerns identified early on in the planning process. Workshop participants further developed the themes, helping the National Forest formulate alternatives. While all alternatives provide a wide range of multiple uses, goods and services, they address the issues in different ways. The result was six alternatives in addition to the No Action Alternative, which would carry forward the emphasis of the current Forest Plan. All alternatives would respect American Indians' rights to hunt, fish, and gather that were retained by treaty.

The National Forest Management Act requires the development and analysis of a broad range of reasonable alternatives that respond to the issues and concerns identified during the planning process. Alternatives must also address the purpose and need for change. The Chippewa National Forest considered a broad range of reasonable alternatives based on the following criteria:

- Alternatives are distributed between minimum and maximum benchmarks
- Alternatives respond to the issues raised during the planning process.
- Alternatives respond to national and regional management direction.
- A range of outcomes and outputs would result from the alternatives.

Alternatives Not Considered In Detail

Twenty-one alternatives were considered during the initial analysis process. Some of these alternatives had similar themes, so they were combined. While many of these were not considered in detail as stand-alone alternatives, they were considered in detail in that they made up parts of the seven alternatives considered in the Final EIS. Several alternatives were eliminated from detailed study for the reasons provided below. These alternatives are labeled by their major emphasis.

Alternatives with Very High Timber Yield

Several alternatives emphasized very high levels of timber harvest, in some cases maximizing sustainable timber harvest. These alternatives, as submitted, were eliminated from detailed consideration because they emphasized timber production to such an extent that management for other resources and resource protection would fall below acceptable levels. Examples of this include scheduling harvest on all forested acres within Candidate RNAs, rather than just acres classified as suitable for timber management. The National Forest Management Act, Multiple Use –Sustained Yield Act, Endangered Species Act,

and other laws require that national forests be managed for a variety of uses and provide resource protections. Many aspects of these alternatives were used, along with modifications and were incorporated into Alternative C, which was considered in detail.

No-harvest Alternative

An alternative was proposed that would essentially eliminate timber harvest on the Chippewa National Forest. The proposal called for a significant amount of restoration of pine forests and allowed for some harvest treatments in the first decade to provide for such restoration. This alternative, as submitted, was eliminated from detailed consideration for several reasons. It was not realistically possible to accomplish the levels of restoration envisioned within the first decade. In later decades, this alternative did not provide for representation of young age classes on the landscape. This alternative was modified to provide more active management in the first two decades to facilitate a higher level of ecological restoration. The modified alternative also included a continuation of harvest, albeit at low levels, in decades 3 through 10 to ensure representation of young age classes. The alternative with these modifications was considered in detail as Alternative D.

Watershed Management Emphasis Alternative

This alternative focused on protecting, enhancing, and restoring water, aquatic, riparian, and wetland resources. It was eliminated from further study because it focused only on the water or wetland portions of the National Forests and provided no management recommendations for the upland, terrestrial portions. It was not a complete alternative and did not address many aspects of the purpose and need for change and would not have responded to many of the issues raised during the planning process. Many of the watershed management proposals from this alternative were incorporated into the alternatives considered in detail.

Alternatives Considered In Detail

Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative is listed as Modified Alternative E in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Alternative E was modified between the Draft and Final EIS in response to public comments and to incorporate data corrections.

Modified Alternative E emphasizes a diverse economic base in local communities. Compared to the other alternatives, the Forest will be managed to provide a wider variety of economic opportunities. This alternative promotes tourism and its associated revenues by emphasizing resources such as recreational opportunities, scenic landscapes, and diverse wildlife habitats. Developed and undeveloped motorized recreational opportunities in a scenic landscape are emphasized. This alternative provides the most opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails compared to other alternatives. There is also a focus on protecting, enhancing, and restoring riparian areas. Old growth forest are provided through vegetative objectives and through non-suitable timberlands within Unique Biological, Geological, Aquatic and Historical Areas and Research Natural Areas and Candidate Research Natural Areas. Three areas are recommended as Candidate Research Natural Areas and 23 areas as Unique Biological, Geologic, Aquatic or

Historical Areas. Additional Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Management Areas are established. No areas are recommended as Wilderness Study Areas. Alternative E emphasizes timber harvesting less than Alternatives C and A, but more than the other alternatives. The allowable sale quantity is 580 million board feet in the first decade.

Alternative A

Alternative A is the 'no action' alternative. In forest plan revision, 'no action' means that guidance for the next ten years would generally be the same as the management direction in the amended 1986 Forest Plan. Alternative A emphasizes managing the forests to provide early-successional vegetation (with an emphasis on aspen), emphasizes timber, and developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities in both motorized and non-motorized settings. The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) in the first decade would be about 700 million board feet. No additional Management Area allocations would be made beyond those in the 1986 Forest Plan.

Alternative B

Alternative B emphasizes restoring older, mixed forests and coniferous species. Protecting unique resources is also emphasized more in this alternative than other alternatives. Timber management and other commercial resource management objectives would be secondary to the objective of increasing the amount of older forest. Old-growth forest areas would be specifically designated and mapped. Nine Candidate Research Natural Areas would be recommended. Approximately 170,000 acres would be in Special Management Complexes. A variety of recreation opportunities would be provided, predominately in semi-primitive settings. There would be fewer opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails than most other alternatives. The allowable sale quantity would be about 380 million board feet in the first decade. Two areas were proposed as Wilderness Study Areas.

Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes producing timber and replicating large-scale natural disturbances, such as large fires or large windstorms. Timber harvest would be the main tool used to create large-scale disturbance. To provide for older trees and wildlife habitat, extended rotations would be used in some situations. Under Alternative C, there would be more large patches of young forest than in Alternative A. Early successional species, such as aspen and birch, would be emphasized, although a variety of species would be provided. Developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities in both motorized and non-motorized settings would be provided. There would be no area recommended for wilderness study, and one area recommended as a Candidate RNA. In the first decade, the allowable sale quantity would be 910 million board feet. Harvest levels in the first ten years of implementation would be higher than subsequent decades in order to capture volume that would be lost to mortality due to age imbalance in the forest. This alternative would depart from a sustained yield non-declining even flow of timber products.

Alternative D

Alternative D emphasizes semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation, and restoring conifers to create an “old-tree” character. The highest priority for restoration would be establishing white pines. Alternative D would provide the greatest percentage of old forest and larger and more connected blocks of old growth compared to all the other alternatives. Two areas that meet the inventory criteria for wilderness would be recommended for wilderness study. Eight Candidate Research Natural Areas would be recommended. Recreation opportunities would primarily be provided in semi-primitive, non-motorized settings, where activities such as hiking canoeing, and backpacking would be common. Under this alternative, vegetation management would transition away from timber production toward ecological succession and some restoration. However, timber harvesting would be used in the first two decades as a tool to restore some cover types. After this 20-year period, a low level of timber harvest would be used to maintain a representation of all forest types and ages. The clearcutting harvest method would generally not be used in this alternative. The volume of timber sold in the first decade would be expected to be about 210 million board feet. This alternative would maintain most, but not all of the existing higher standards roads while decommissioning many of the existing low standard roads. This alternative would depart from a non-declining even-flow of timber products because it would harvest more in the first two decades and significantly less in future decades.

Alternative E

Modified Alternative E was selected as the Revised Forest Plan and is described in detail in the earlier section of the Record of Decision under the title of “Decision Summary and Rationale”. This alternative had several changes from the Alternative E that was described and analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Those changes are described in the previous section entitled “Changes Between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements”.

Alternative F

Alternative F emphasizes managing National Forest System lands toward a vegetative condition that is within the range of natural variability. Timber harvest and prescribed fire would be used to mimic natural disturbances. Ecological processes would be maintained or restored using a variety of timber harvest methods, management-ignited fire, and by allowing natural processes to operate. Conifer and northern hardwood forest types would be restored. Areas that historically experienced high-intensity, stand-replacing events such as wildfires and large-scale blowdowns would be intensively managed. However, areas that experienced low-intensity, stand maintenance events such as surface fires and minor wind throw would be less intensively managed. No areas would be recommended for wilderness study and ten candidate Research Natural Areas would be identified. Developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities in both motorized and non-motorized settings would be provided. The current trail system would be maintained, and there would be additional opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails. In the first decade, the allowable sale quantity would be 370 million board feet.

Alternative G

Alternative G emphasizes managing vegetation communities in a way that distributes young forest, older forest, and old growth across the Forests. Under Alternative G, the Forests would be ‘zoned’ as young, mature, or older forests. Timber harvest and prescribed fire would be used to mimic natural disturbances. Ecological processes would be maintained or restored using a variety of timber harvest methods, management-ignited fire, and by allowing natural processes to operate. Conifer and northern hardwood forest types would be restored. One area would be recommended for wilderness study, nine Candidate Research Natural Areas would be identified and approximately 86,000 acres would be allocated as Special Management Complexes. Developed and undeveloped recreational opportunities would be provided in both motorized and non-motorized settings. The current trail system would be maintained, and there would be additional opportunities for new ATV and snowmobile trails. In the first decade, the allowable sale quantity would be 460 million board feet.

Consistency with the Plans of Others

It is important that the management direction within the Revised Plan for the Chippewa National Forest take into consideration and be generally consistent with the plans of other governments and agencies within the landscape.

Superior National Forest Revised Plan

The Superior and Chippewa National Forests are both located in northern Minnesota, with a relatively short distance separating the two. It is important that these two Revised Plans are consistent, except where ecologic or social conditions would warrant a difference. The Chippewa and Superior National Forests have worked closely together throughout the entire process of revising the forest plans. A single interdisciplinary team conducted the analysis and prepared the two Revised Plans. This team prepared a single Environmental Impact Statement covering the effects of alternatives on both Forests.

County Plans

Throughout the revision process, the Forest Service has worked closely with commissioners from Beltrami, Cass and Itasca Counties. The Forest Service reviewed and considered these county's comprehensive or land use plans in the development of the Revised Forest Plan. I believe the Revised Plan will contribute toward goals of these County Plans.

Minnesota Forest Resource Council Reports

The Chippewa National Forest was an active participant in the development of site-level guidelines and the North-central landscape desired outcomes report. The Revised Plan incorporates much of the site level guidelines in its management direction. The landscape ecosystem and vegetation objectives in the Revised Plan are consistent with the Desired Future Forest Conditions and recommended goals and strategies of the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's North-central Landscape Report.

Consistency with Other National Policies, Laws, and Authorities

The Forest Service manages the Chippewa National Forest in conformance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here is not a complete list of all governing statutes that apply to the Forest Plan Revision, but it highlights the primary statutes guiding the preparation of the Revised Plan. In all cases the Revised Plan is consistent with national law, policy, and direction.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Forest has compiled and generated an enormous amount of information relevant to the effects of each of the alternatives considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with each of the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). These include 1) Considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives; 2) disclosing cumulative effects; 3) using the best scientific information; 4) considering long-term and short-term effects; and 5) disclosing unavoidable adverse effects.

The decision here does not directly authorize any new ground disturbing activities or projects, but rather ground disturbing activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement and administrative appeal procedures.

The Revised Plan has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing those ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The Revised Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Regulations implementing NEPA also require the specification of "...the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Based on the analysis of effects contained in the FEIS, I have determined that Alternative F is the environmentally preferable alternative. The main emphasis of Alternative F is an ecological approach, which moves the vegetative condition of the Chippewa National Forest to within the range of natural variability. It was the only alternative considered in detail that took this approach. Unlike each of the other alternatives, which had themes that integrated ecologic, social and economic considerations, under Alternative F most resource outputs were provided only if they were a result of the ecologic management. An exception to this was the addition of some specific recreation decisions, such as motorized trail miles and water access sites.

Management Area allocations were based solely upon ecologic considerations. It also allocated 21,629 acres in Minimum Management Natural Areas.

Alternative F was not selected as the Revised Plan because, while it addressed the ecologic aspect of the human environment, it focused little attention on the equally important social and economic aspects. I believe my choice of the Selected Alternative is the appropriate management approach for these Forests to provide the highest net benefit to the public over the long-term.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

When the Chippewa's Plan revision effort began in 1997, the Agency's 1982 planning regulations were in effect. On November 9, 2000, new planning rules were adopted. However, the 2000 planning rule allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the 1982 rule if the revision had begun before the 2000 rule was issued. The Chippewa National Forest met this criterion and therefore proceeded to completion under the 1982 planning regulations.

The NFMA planning regulations specifies a number of requirements that guide Forest Service planning. The Revised Forest Plan complies with each of these management requirements, as explained in this Record of Decision, the accompanying FEIS and Appendices.

Present Net Value and Net Public Benefit

The 1982 Planning Rule requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the present net value (PNV) and how the Revised Plan compares to this. According to the economic analysis displayed in the Final EIS, Alternative C maximizes PNV due to the higher level of timber harvest predicted and the revenue generated as a result. Alternative C has a PNV of \$10,279 million. The Revised Plan, Modified Alternative E has a PNV of \$10,251 million, and ranked 3rd among all alternatives. While Alternative C has a slightly higher PNV, the Revised Plan provides the highest net public benefit. Many benefits associated with the Revised Plan are not captured in fees or revenues nor are they necessarily quantifiable. For this reason, the alternative that maximizes PNV is not the alternative that has the highest net public benefit. I have determined that the Revised Plan has the highest net public benefit.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act creates an affirmative obligation "...that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened (and proposed) species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in the national Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to "...enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources."

Based upon consultation with the USFWS, their concurrence with our Biological Assessment and the finding of a non-jeopardy in their Biological Opinion, I have determined that the Revised Plan is in compliance with the ESA.

Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) and Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008

The 1982 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulation (36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest/Grassland as displayed in Regional Guides. The Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004-2008, in lieu of an RPA Program, was completed in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. While Forest Plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic plan and should consider the information provided by the RPA Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs to incorporate in specific Forest Plans. I find that the Revised Plan is in compliance with, and contributes toward the broad goals of the Forest Service Strategic Plan, which are:

Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire

The revised Forest Plan contains management direction in the form of desired conditions and objectives to increase the amount of forest restored to or maintained in healthy condition to reduce risk and damage from fire. The Revised Plan also focuses on treating vegetation in high hazard areas within the wildland/urban interface areas to reduce risk from wildland fire.

Reduce the impacts from invasive species

The Revised Plan contains direction to address the spread of terrestrial or aquatic non-native invasive species that pose a threat to native ecosystems.

Provide Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

As outlined elsewhere in this Record of Decision, the Revised Plan places additional emphasis on recreational use of the Chippewa National Forest. It increases allocations to management areas that have recreation as a primary emphasis and increases direction needed to better manage the use of recreational motor vehicles.

Help Meet Energy Resource Needs

There are no biomass energy projects currently in operation in the area surrounding the Chippewa National Forest. However, if a nearby biomass or energy project were developed, it could create a market for smaller diameter trees and lower quality wood products that would contribute to our ability to meet vegetative objectives identified in the Revised Plan. Stands not economic to treat under current utilization standards for pulpwood or saw timber may become operable.

Improve Watershed Conditions

The Revised Plan employs a proactive approach to the management of watersheds and riparian areas. It also allocates the headwater of the Mississippi River to the Unique Biological, Geological, Aquatic and Historical Management Area. It also allocates 52,883 acres in Riparian Emphasis Management Areas.

Mission-related work in addition to that which supports agency goals

This goal deals largely with processes. While the Revised Plan specifically focuses on desired conditions and objectives, and not the processes to achieve them, we will improve our productivity and efficiency as we implement the Revised Plan.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA)

In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act was signed into law. I find that Revised Plan is consistent with HFRA in that it provides for the protection of old growth when conducting HFRA covered projects, provides for public involvement in assessing and conducting hazardous fuels reductions projects and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuels reduction based on condition class and fire regime. The Revised Plan also emphasizes protection and enhancement of riparian areas and watershed health as directed under HFRA.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, that the revised Forest Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The revised Forest Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to direction of the revised Forest Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The revised Forest Plan contains direction for cultural resource management including direction to integrate cultural resource management with other resource management activities.

Several other laws apply to the preservation of cultural resources on federal land. Since the revised Forest Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) under the NHPA is not required.

Tribal consultation has occurred during the development of this revised Forest Plan.

It is my determination that the revised Forest Plan complies with the NHPA and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources

Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Government (1994)

These policies support the Forest Service actions in establishing mutual and beneficial partnerships with American Indians and Alaska Natives and honoring treaty obligations. Forest Service policy is recorded in FSM 1563.

Other Laws, Policy and Regulations

I also find that FEIS and the revised Forest Plan are consistent with the following body of policy and regulation: the National Energy Policy (Executive Order 13212), the Transportation Rule and Policy, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Energy Requirement and Conservation Potential, Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species, Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum # 1827 on Prime Farmland, Rangeland and Forestland, Executive Order 1099 on the protection of Wetlands and Floodplains, and the existing body of National direction for managing National Forests.

Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Implementation Begins in 30 Days

The Forest Plan becomes effective in 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final EIS is published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1)). Implementation of the Revised Plan will be accomplished and tracked through the management direction detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Revised Plan. The desired conditions and objectives in Chapter 2 will be used to help design the Forest's annual program of work and budget requests.

Transition from 1986 Plan to Revised Forest Plan

Revised Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this was a revision of the 1986 Chippewa Forest Plan, much of the management direction from the 1986 Plan is carried forward relatively unchanged into the Revised Plan. Therefore, many existing projects and ongoing actions that were consistent with the 1986 Plan will continue to be so with the Revised Plan.

Many management actions decided prior to issuance of the Record of Decision are routine and ongoing. Those decisions are generally allowed to continue unchanged because the projected effects of these actions are part of the baseline analysis considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Biological Assessments for the revision.

The National Forest Management Act requires that “permits, contracts and other instruments for use and occupancy” of National Forest System lands be “consistent” with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1640(i)). In the context of a Revised Plan, the National Forest Management Act specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

1. These documents must be revised only “when necessary;”
2. These documents must be revised as “soon as practicable;”
3. Any revisions are “subject to valid existing rights.”

I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the Revised Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms and these effects and conditions were considered in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Existing timber contracts will, in most cases, be completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. These use and occupancy agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the revised Forest Plan. Recent project decisions that have not yet been implemented will be reviewed and adjusted by the decision maker, if necessary, to meet the direction found in the revised Plan.

The decision maker has the discretion on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations to bring them into compliance with the revised Forest Plan standards and guidelines. I find that the statutory criteria of “as soon as practicable” and excepting “valid existing rights” useful in exercising that discretion.

Key Considerations in Plan Implementation

The Revised Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape level direction for managing the Chippewa National Forest. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the Revised Plan will be accomplished through site-specific project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and regulations. The Revised Plan, itself makes no project level decisions. One exception is the decision to prohibit cross-country use (use off of designated roads and trails) by recreational motor vehicles. As soon as the Revised Plan is effective, closure orders will be issued as needed to prohibit this cross-country use. No further site specific analysis under NEPA will be required for this action as the required analysis and disclosure has been accomplished through the accompanying FEIS.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan did consider and evaluate the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the Revised Plan. It also dealt with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger landscape or forest-wide level. Therefore, in essence, the Final Environmental Impact Statement is a large cumulative effects document, because it analyzed the total of activities that may be expected in the first decade (and longer term) and disclosed the forest-wide effects of those activities considered in total.

By tiering to the Final Environmental Impact Statement, we will make use of this forest-wide analysis to streamline our environmental analysis for project-level decisions. We will not revisit landscape or forest-wide scale issues and effects because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the forest-wide level. Findings related to species viability and threatened species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the Revised Plan and Final EIS. Project level analyses will focus, as they appropriately should, on the impacts and effects at the specific site. Project-level decisions will not determine whether implementation of the Plan is appropriate, but rather, which management techniques (if any) and mitigations (beyond those in the Revised Plan) are best suited to the site being analyzed.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Under the Revised Plan, areas listed in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule have been assigned to a variety of management prescriptions. There is considerable uncertainty about the future of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule due to pending litigation.

On January 12, 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) was published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 294). The Roadless Rule prohibited with certain exceptions, road construction and reconstruction activities; and the timber cutting, sale, or removal activities that could occur in the inventoried roadless areas identified in the Roadless Rule Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Roadless Rule in 36 CFR

294.12 and 294.13, identified the exceptions where road construction/reconstruction activities and timber cutting/removal activities would be allowed.

Subsequently, several groups and States filed lawsuits challenging the Roadless Rule. On July 14, 2003, the United States District Court, Wyoming District (Judge Clarence Brimmer), found the Roadless Rule to be in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act, and permanently enjoined its implementation and set the rule aside. The effect of this ruling is that direction for inventoried roadless areas reverts to the direction provided in the Revised Forest Plan. However, this issue is not settled. Appeals of the Wyoming District Court decision, other litigation, new rulemaking, or new Forest Service directives could result in a change in direction for the management of inventoried roadless areas.

In managing the areas identified as roadless in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, the Chippewa National Forest will follow the management direction contained in this Revised Forest Plan and any Forest Service policy on roadless area management specified in the Forest Service directives. However, should the Roadless Rule become effective, it will supercede this Revised Plan for those inventoried roadless areas identified in the Roadless Rule Final Environmental Impact Statement that was completed in November 2000. This would mean that some areas identified in the Forest Plan as available for road construction and timber harvest could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the Roadless Rule. According to 36 CFR 294.14(b), should the Roadless Rule become effective, an amendment to this Revised Forest Plan would not be needed to implement its direction.

Future Changes to the Plan

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the Revised Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will tightly focus on decisions made in the Record of Decision.

Evaluation reports will display how Forest Plan decisions have been implemented, how effective the implementation has proven to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what we learned along the way. This will allow a check and review of the validity of the assumptions upon which this decision is based.

The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 ties well with the strategic nature of Forest Plans, with increasing specificity as the Plan is stepped down to specific projects. This monitoring framework has four key monitoring elements. The first element is the direction provided in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. The remaining three are implementation tools to ensure a common approach in monitoring plan direction:

1. The Forest Plan (Chapter 4) Direction that provides *broad, strategic* guidance.
2. A Procedural Guide that provides *specific, technical* guidance.
3. An Annual Monitoring Schedule that outlines *annual, specific tasks* for the current year.
4. An Annual Monitoring Evaluation Review that provides a forum to *review current year findings* and identify specific modifications if necessary.

Amending the Forest Plan

The revision of this Forest Plan is shaped by a central idea: how we manage the forest should adapt to changes in how we understand the ecological, social and economic environments. In the Forest Service, we call this adaptive management. The Revised Plan is well structured for adaptive management to occur because it does a good job of describing the desired conditions toward which we will strive as we implement the Plan. In fact, those desired conditions are the very basis for the projects we will accomplish during the life of the Plan.

In making the decision on the Revised Plan, I am also deciding that this plan will be adaptive and subject to change as we monitor, learn, and gain new information. I hope that you choose to be partners with us in our monitoring, learning, and adapting. The revision of the Chippewa National Forest Plan has taken many years and has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1986 Plan and even as the new Plan was developed. However, as I have said before, this Plan is not perfect. Neither is it cast in stone to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 15 years. We will track progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the Plan, and modify or reformulate management actions in response to that progress. If a particular management strategy, technique or practice is applied, its results will be monitored to see if the desired effect is occurring, and if not, a modified or new strategy will be developed and implemented. That new strategy will also be subject to monitoring, evaluation, and, if needed, change.

Changes to the Plan will generally take the form of plan Amendments and will follow the appropriate procedures specified in the National Forest Management Act regulations. The correction of simple errors may take the form of an errata statement.

My decision in choosing this Revised Plan along with adaptive management will result in a cycle of learning and adjustment through which the Chippewa National Forest will be able to provide the most appropriate package of benefits to the American people.

Administrative Appeal of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the Milwaukee Journal. Appeals must be sent to:

Regular Mail: USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination 1400 Independence Ave, SW Mailstop Code 1104 Washington, DC 20250-1104	Express Mail: USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination 201 14 th Street, SW 3 rd Floor, Central Wing Washington, DC 20024 Phone: (202) 205-0895
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A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Regional Forester of the Eastern Region
USDA Forest Service
Eastern Region
626 East Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject.
- Date of the decision and name of and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
- The reason for the appeal including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Contacts

More information on this decision, the revised Chippewa National Forest Land and Resource Plan, and/or the Chippewa and Superior National Forests Final Environmental Impact Statement can be obtained by contacting:

Norman Wagoner
Forest Supervisor
(218) 335-8600

or

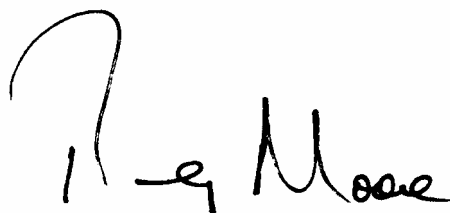
Brenda Halter-Glenn
Forest Planner
(218) 335-8651

or

Kay Getting
Public Affairs
(218) 335-8673

200 Ash Ave NW
Cass Lake, MN 56633

Electronic copies of the FEIS, the Forest Plan, the Executive Summary or the Record of Decision can be obtained at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/chippewa/plan/final/index.shtml>



Randy Moore, Regional Forester

July 30, 2004

Date